

News from Ed Markey

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MARKEY INTRODUCES “LEAVE ALL BLADES BEHIND ACT” BANNING BOX CUTTERS, KNIVES, AND OTHER DANGEROUS WEAPONS FROM PASSENGER PLANES

Washington, DC - Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee and longstanding advocate for strengthened aviation security, and Representative Joseph Crowley, Chief Deputy Whip and leading member of the New York City delegation today announced their plan to introduce the “Leave All Blades Behind Act” in order to preserve the current ban on knives and other sharp objects that has kept these items off passenger planes since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Tomorrow the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is expected to announce its intention to lift this ban, effective later this month.

“TSA should not be making it easier for a terrorist to take over a passenger airplane. On September 11th, we witnessed the devastation and death that can be perpetrated onboard a plane with commonly-used items like boxcutters, and TSA wisely took action to ban such sharp objects. Now is not the time to overturn this ban, since we know that Al Qaeda continues to put passenger plans near the top of its terrorist target list,” Rep. Markey said.

“This would effectively loosen the restrictions on the same items that led to the worst terrorist attacks in history. I lost my cousin, a former FDNY Chief on 9-11 and the fact is that we are no safer today than we were 4 years ago,” said Crowley. “Flight attendants and airline passengers put themselves at risk everyday. There are more effective ways of increasing efficiency without compromising security.”

The Association of Flight Attendants has also objected to the revised provisions. “Under no circumstance should potentially dangerous weapons be allowed onboard an aircraft,” said Patricia Friend, Association of Flight Attendants-CWA International President. “The devastating effects of 9/11 showed the world how a simple box cutter could become a deadly weapon in the hands of the wrong person. Flight attendants already have to be extra vigilant these days, and the fact that TSA wants them to contend with these hazardous objects is ridiculous. You can not take these objects to a sports complex, a museum, or a courthouse, you shouldn’t be allowed to bring them on an aircraft either.”

“If TSA does not abandon its decision to permit these potential weapons onboard planes, I will introduce a bill to ensure that the current ban remains in effect. Flight attendants came face-to-face with the blood-thirsty 9/11 hijackers on that clear autumn morning more than four years ago. It is widely believed that flight attendants were the first to die on September 11th. The Association of Flight Attendants is firmly opposed to lifting the ban on these hazardous carry-on items. We should listen to them, not brush away their concerns, which reflect the hard experience of one of the most painful moments in our nation’s history,” Rep. Markey concluded.

A letter sent from Rep. Markey to DHS in August can be found at http://www.house.gov/markey/Issues/iss_aviationsec_ltr050818.pdf and the fact check on the Markey “Leave All Blades Behind Act” is below.

The Markey “Leave All Blades Behind Act”

December 1, 2005

Background

- Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee and longstanding advocate of strengthened aviation security measures, is announcing today that he will introduce the “Leave All Blades Behind Act” when Congress reconvenes next week.
- The legislation would prevent the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) from permitting weapons-usable items such as metal scissors with razor-sharp edges and pointed tips to be carried aboard passenger planes. Currently such items are not permitted to be carried onboard, and the legislation is designed to stop TSA from changing its prohibited items list to enable such dangerous objects to be carried onboard.

Situation

- The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has announced that it will revise the current list of items that passengers are prohibited from carrying when they travel on airplanes. It has been reported that the changes will be announced on Friday December 2, 2005 and will become effective on Tuesday December 20, 2005. (“Significant Changes in Air Passenger Screening Lie Ahead”, New York Times, December 1, 2005)
- Under the current TSA ban, passengers are not permitted to bring metal scissors with pointed tips, screw drivers and other items that could be used as weapons.
- According to the New York Times report cited above, TSA will eliminate the ban on metal scissors with a blade of four inches or less and tools of seven inches or less – including screwdrivers, wrenches and pliers.
- The Association of Flight Attendants (AFA) firmly opposes the planned TSA changes. It is believed that flight attendants and passengers were killed with boxcutters by the 9/11 terrorists as a means for taking over control of the aircraft.
- Jon Adler, executive vice president of the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, which represents federal air marshals, said that allowing scissors and small tools on planes was a mistake.

Solution

- TSA should not try to solve a resource problem by creating a potential security problem for passengers and flight attendants. If TSA does not have enough screeners to detect weapons-usable items like sharp scissors while also scanning for bombs, the answer is more screeners, not less scrutiny.
- TSA should be taking items out of the terrorist toolbox, rather than opening up the passenger cabin of commercial aircraft to more items that could be used as weapons.
- The Markey “Leave All Blades Behind Act” would prevent TSA from changing its prohibited items list so that weapons-usable items are kept out of the passenger cabin.